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## The Dennis Report

STRANGERS ON A BRIDGE: THE CASE OF COLONEL ABEL by James B. Donovan. 432 pages. Atheneum. \$6.95.

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One day early in 1962, Brooklyn Attorney James B. Donovan received a cablegram from Berlin which said only: HAPPY NEW YEAR—HELEN. The message was a coded signal that set in motion one of the dramatic moments of the cold war—the exchange of U-2 Pilot Francis Gary Powers for Russian Colonel Rudolph Ivanovich Abel, a top Soviet spy who had been imprisoned in the U.S. for the previous 4½ years. In this absorbing new book, Lawyer Donovan, the amateur diplomat who later negotiated the release of the Bay of Pigs prisoners, recounts the events leading up to the Berlin swap.

Donovan first met Abel in 1957 when the court appointed him to handle the Red spy's defense. The Government's case appeared airtight; the FBI had bagged Abel with all the paraphernalia of his trade—short-wave radios, hollowed-out bolts and tie clasps, coded messages, code book, microfilm equipment, and marked maps of major U.S. defense installations. Though Abel was found guilty, Donovan's contention that the Government's evidence had been illegally obtained without a warrant nearly caused the Supreme Court to reverse the conviction on appeal. Before sentence was passed, Donovan urged that the possible death penalty not be invoked because "it is possible that in the foreseeable future an American of equivalent rank will be captured by Soviet Russia; at such time, an exchange of prisoners could be considered to be in the best interest of the U.S."

Private Citizen. Russia was most anxious to get Abel back. After the trial a woman claiming to be Abel's wife wrote Donovan regularly from East Germany and hinted at the possibility of a deal. But U.S. security officials opposed an exchange; they were still hopeful that Abel might one day turn canary and spill what he knew about Soviet intelligence. Abel, however, was a tough customer. A scholarly intellectual who spoke six languages fluently, dabbled in theoretical mathematics, and was an accomplished amateur painter and musician, he never admitted either his real name (Abel was a pseudonym) or even that he was a Red agent.

After Francis Powers was shot down

over Russia in 1960, the trade winds began to blow harder. Convinced that Abel would never talk and that the trial publicity and four-year prison term had destroyed his usefulness to the Russians as a spy, the Kennedy Administration was willing to make a swap. But since Russia had made no formal overtures the U.S. conducted its negotiations through Donovan, who worked closely with the Government as a "private citizen." When the New Year's message was received, Donovan was ready.

No Recognition. To prevent security leaks, U.S. intelligence officials gave Donovan the cover name of "Mr. Dennis," secretly flew him to Berlin in a military plane. But, officially, the U.S. mission in Berlin tried not to recognize that Donovan was in the city; fearing an incident that might diplomatically



DONOVAN & ABEL  
Saved by a trade wind.

implicate the U.S., the mission refused even to supply him with an interpreter.

Across the Wall, Donovan came face to face with the eerie demimonde of international espionage. His main contact was a purported second-string Russian diplomat named Schischkin, whom U.S. intelligence believed to be the top Soviet spy in Europe. In cahoots with Schischkin were two women, who maintained that they were Abel's wife and daughter and now claimed East German citizenship. Suddenly the Reds began to play hard to get. Their ploy was obvious; they hoped to badger Donovan into a misstep that might imply U.S. recognition of East Germany.

Donovan refused to play, and when he threatened to break off negotiations, the Russians finally yielded. Abel was flown to Berlin, and on a cold, clear February morning, the Red spy and Powers passed each other without a word in the middle of Berlin's Glienicke Bridge, which links the two sectors of the embattled city.

*Strangers on a Bridge* is both an eloquent brief for the American judicial system and a topnotch spy thriller. A former OSS officer, Donovan mentions in passing a number of the tricks of the trade. Best: one of Abel's subordinates announced his arrival in the U.S. by placing a white tack in a signboard in Manhattan's Central Park.

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